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TAGS: OPRC KMDR KPAO TW

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: CROSS-STRAIT RELATIONS

Summary: News coverage of Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies October 23 focused on the indictment of lawmaker Gao Jyh-peng, who is considered to be close to President Chen Shui-bian, for allegedly accepting bribes; and on state-run financial institutions, which were criticized for campaigning for the ruling DPP, including providing funds to promote the bid for UN membership. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial of the pro-independence English-language "Taipei Times" said Taiwan is forced to find asymmetrical or nonconventional means to counter China's threat, and the economy may be China's Achilles' heel. End summary.

A) "Taiwan Must Fight Like a Flea"

The pro-independence English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (10/23):

"In his classic study of guerrilla warfare 'War of the Flea,' Robert Taber compares the small, disadvantaged opponent in an armed conflict to a flea, whose small, intractable nature can be turned into an advantage against its enemy.

"As the military divide between China and Taiwan widens in China's favor -- thanks, in part, to the Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) efforts to block weapons development and acquisition -- Taiwanese who are committed to defending the nation have had little choice but to begin considering asymmetrical or nonconventional options. That is, they have been forced to look at a potential war with China from the flea's perspective.

"While much has been said in recent weeks about Taiwan's development of the Hsiung Feng II-E cruise missile and -- for a brief, hallucinatory moment -- nuclear weapons, ultimately these remain part of an arsenal that, should war break out, stands little chance of overwhelming Beijing's massive and widely distributed forces. Even if, for a while, Taiwan could inflict punitive damage against an invading People's Liberation Army (PLA), past experience shows that massive casualties within PLA ranks does not deter Beijing.

".... Two traditional pillars of deterrence -- massive military losses or threats against civilian populations (a reprehensible option) -- are denied Taiwan. It must therefore find China's Achilles' heel elsewhere.

"And that's its economy.

Enter the graphite, or 'blackout' bomb, a non-lethal weapon that can knock out an enemy's power grid by short-circuiting it. Taiwan has announced it could begin development of that weapon, which can be dropped by aircraft or mounted onto cruise missiles such as the Hsiung Feng. Whether that device will suffer the same fate as the Hsiung Feng at the hands of the KMT remains to be seen, but its introduction shows that a paradigm shift has occurred within the nation's defense apparatus, which, by sheer virtue of its size and

the prevailing international context that favors China, is awakening to the realization that it cannot hope to compete with China in conventional military terms.

"Beyond the graphite bomb, Taiwan must explore other venues where its technological advantage could be put to good use and continue to identify other weaknesses in China's defenses, such as maritime ports, industrial centers and command-and-control nodes.

"Beijing has made no secret of the fact that, aside from the very survival of the Chinese Communist Party, the economy is paramount. Many of its policies are formulated to ensure that economic growth continues unhampered, even at a debilitating social or environmental cost. It is therefore not difficult to imagine how Beijing could be made to pause should a credible threat to its economy come from Taipei.

"Taiwan has all it needs to mount a countervailing strategy based on innovative technologies and an asymmetrical mindset to make Beijing think twice before it attempts to take on the flea.

"The beauty of it is that Taiwan might not even have to kill people to achieve its objectives."

YOUNG